

“How Jesus Changes Lives – Part 1”

Text: Acts 16:9-15

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on September 8, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** If you are new to Central, I want to give you a special welcome. You’ve come on the perfect Sunday. Today I want to talk about the big picture of what Central is all about. And I also want to talk about the problem with this big picture. We have crystalized this into a short sentence: it is our vision to be a church that is **(SHOW SLIDE 2) renewing our community through the gospel.**
 - To renew something means to make it new. We begin with the basic fact that the world is broken and needs to be made new.
 - We believe the gospel, or good news, about Jesus Christ is the answer to this. Jesus has the power to renew every part of your life from your relationship with God, to your family, and your work.
 - By “our community” we first mean ourselves; we need renewal. Our community also refers to our city and those places in the world where we have influence.
- But here is the problem: how can we see this vision become a reality when our city is so diverse? Diversity is what makes Victoria great but it is also presents many challenges.
 - For instance, think of our *socio-economic diversity*. Victoria has middle-class men and women serving in the Armed Forces, young people who are homeless on Pandora, and families living in oceanfront mansions in Oak Bay. This diversity leads some people to say, **“Religion is helpful for people who need a crutch because their life is falling apart but I’m successful and so don’t need it.”**
 - Victoria is also becoming more *ethnically diverse*. This is wonderful but it also causes some people to say, **“Christianity is a western white man’s religion and not relevant to other kinds of people like women from Asia who follow other spiritual paths.”**
 - Cities also have lots of people, which means greater *diversity in personalities and interests*. This can lead people to say, **“I’m just not the religious type. You are bent that way but I’m not.”**
 - And then, finally, there is the *spiritual diversity* of our city. A small percentage claim to be atheists. Every major religion is represented. Most people in Victoria say they are spiritual but not religious and practice things like meditation, yoga, and check their daily horoscope.
 - So it is our desire to see our city renewed through the good news about Jesus Christ. But how can this happen when the diversity of the city brings so many challenges?
- For the next four weeks I want to take us on a journey through Acts chapter 16. This is the story of how the good news about Jesus first came to the ancient city of Philippi—a city that was just as diverse as Victoria. You will notice in verse 12 that Luke, the author who was also a medical doctor, calls Philippi a **“leading city of the district of Macedonia.”** So, this isn’t a story about how the gospel came to nice little town like Ladysmith or Sooke but how it came to a leading city like Victoria. This chapter is Dr. Luke’s eyewitness account.
 - Many people became Christians but Luke selects three case scenarios. These three urban people could not be more different from one another. And yet we see that God

used Paul, Luke, and others to bring the renewing power of the gospel to this city and to its diverse types of people.

- Today I am praying that Jesus will meet with each of us in our own unique way. I am also praying that you will discover the important role you have in bringing the renewing power of the gospel to our city. The challenges may seem great but your role isn't that complicated.
- So, here's the question: how will the diverse people of Victoria experience the renewing power of Jesus? This passage calls us to do three things:
 - First, go to the city. Second, talk with people about Jesus. Third, watch God work.

GO TO THE CITY

- If we want the people of Victoria to experience the renewing power of the gospel we must, first, **(SHOW SLIDE 3) Go to the city.**
 - The book of Acts is the story of how the good news about Jesus spread from Jerusalem out to the ends of the earth. Up to this point in the story, the good news has not reached what is now modern-day Europe. But God wants these people to hear the good news. Through a vision, God calls Paul and his companions to go to a region called Macedonia, which is modern day Greece.
 - Look at verse 10. **READ 10 - *And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.***
- Luke then describes the route they took in verses 11-12. **READ 11-12 - *So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.***
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** Here is a map of the Mediterranean Sea. Troas is here in modern-day Turkey. They had to take a boat to what is now modern-day Greece. Let's zoom in on this.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** You can see they set sail from Troas, stopped off at an island called Samothrace for a night, and then sailed to Neapolis the next day. They walked right through Neapolis, not because people in Neapolis don't need Jesus but because the leading city was Philippi, which was about 17km from where they got off the boat in Neapolis. Then they stayed in Philippi for some days before doing anything.
 - Let me translate all this into modern day terms. Think of Troas like Tsawwassen. They boarded BC Ferries, enjoyed a Triple O burger, got off at Salt Spring Island, and stayed at a nice Air BnB for the night. The next day they caught the ferry to Swartz Bay but they didn't stay in Sidney. They passed right by and went into Victoria where they spent a few days touring the inner harbor, walking Beacon Hill Park, and discovering new wonders like Habit Coffee, Tacofino, and Red Fish Blue Fish.
- Now, Dr. Luke wants to emphasize the diversity of this city called Philippi. He tells us three stories of three very different people, all of whom had life-changing encounters with Jesus.
 - There is the story of a business woman named Lydia, the story of a fortune-telling slave girl, and the story of a man who is a guard at the local jail.
- Let's begin with Lydia. We discover a few things about her.
 - First, *she's an urban woman from Asia.* Look at verse 14. **READ 14 - *One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira.***

- Thyatira is a few hundred kilometers from the ferry terminal at Troas. It is in modern day Turkey, which is the beginning of the continent of Asia.
 - Second, *she is an upper-class business woman who has an eye for beauty*. Look at verse 14 again. It says Lydia was **READ 14 - a seller of purple goods**.
 - Thyatira was famous for its dyes. For over a thousand years, purple clothing was expensive and often associated with royalty because the dye had to be extracted one drop at a time from a specific purple fish or be harvested from a root. Lydia has immigrated over to Philippi and has opened a retail shop to sell beautiful purple clothes to upper class people who can afford them. This has also made her wealthy for we read at the end of the chapter that she owns a house.
 - She is most likely a single woman, or perhaps widowed or divorced. We know this because she runs a business, owns a house, and is said to be the head of her household, which includes her servants and children if she has any.
 - One final thing about Lydia: *she is open to spiritual things*. Look one more time at verse 14. **READ 14 - who was a worshiper of God**. This is a technical term to describe someone who is not a Jew but who is participating in Jewish worship.
 - So, in modern terms Lydia might be like a wealthy single business woman from the Philippines who immigrated to Victoria, owns a house in Oak Bay, and runs a high-end clothing boutique inside the Empress Hotel. She hasn't found what she is looking for in atheism, in West Coast spirituality, or in any other religions and so she sits in on worship services at Central and is attending Christianity Explored to learn more.
- Lydia could not be more different from the next story in Acts 16, which we will look at in two weeks. Here we find a local teenage girl from Philippi who is Greek, not Asian. She has some sort of fortune telling abilities through an evil spirit. Just like today, people want to know their future and so she makes money off this. But some men enslave and exploit her so that all the money she makes goes to them. She is mentally unstable and follows Paul and his friends around yelling about them to everyone until Paul finally casts the evil spirit out of her.
 - In modern terms she is a teenage girl who grew up in Victoria and who is deep into spirituality with mediums, tarot cards, and fortune telling. But she is also a drug addict living on the streets. Her drug dealers exploit her in order to keep making money. She wanders around downtown Victoria yelling at everyone and everything.
- Finally, we have the story of the jailer who sort of falls between Lydia and the slave girl. In verse 12 Luke emphasized that Philippi is a Roman colony. It was packed with military veterans who retired there. Considering their skillsets, soldiers were given the job of guarding prisoners at the jail. So, this guard at the jail is a blue-collar ex-military guy who knows how to hurt people and has done it many times.
 - In modern terms, he's a blue-collar Canadian guy who retired from the Navy at fifty-five and lives in Esquimalt. He's been everywhere and seen everything and is now working for government security at the Parliament buildings.
 - So, here's the point so far: Paul and his friends are to go to the city. Like all cities, Philippi is filled with very diverse people.
- God still calls Christians to go to cities. The diversity of a city makes it great but it also makes it challenging. Because of diversity you can walk from our church and eat sushi, Indian, Chinese,

or Mexican for lunch. But this great diversity also means we face issues like racism, poverty, drug addiction, prostitution, and violence.

- I have observed that conservative Christians often develop negative attitudes toward cities. They want to escape to protect themselves and their children. Cities can be hard. Cities can be dark. Christians often flee the city.
 - But listen, God calls his people to go to the city, to take on the challenges that come with diversity so that people can hear about Jesus. We know this at Central. Our location makes it more challenging to be part of this church than just about any other in the CRD. We constantly clean graffiti off our building. Someone smashed the windows on our front doors on Christmas Day. We have to be vigilant about security. Parking is not as easy as elsewhere. Pandora Street is tough. But since when did Jesus say, “Start churches where and things are easy and everyone is the same”?
- We know it is difficult to be in the city but we want to take on that challenge. We want to be a church that is *in* the city and *for* the city. So, if you want a church where everything is shiny and nice, then this church may not be for you. But if you want to make your life count doing something that will be difficult but worthwhile then welcome to Central.
 - That’s the first point. If we want to see the gospel renew our community then we must not flee the city. Rather, we must go to the city. But what do we do after we go to the city?

TALK WITH PEOPLE ABOUT JESUS

- **(SHOW SLIDE 6) Secondly, talk with people about Jesus.**
 - What did Paul and his friends do after they had spent a few days settling into the city? Look with me at verse 13. **READ 13 - *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.***
- Judaism required a minimum of ten Jewish men to start a synagogue. Where there were not enough men, the handful of Jews would gather near some water so they could ritually wash their hands for prayer.
 - So, this is a small group. Paul does not stand like when you address a large audience. He sits. He waits his turn. And then as per their purpose back in verse 10 they start a discussion concerning the good news about Jesus.
 - Like he did in so many previous synagogues, he would have shared with them that Jesus is the one whom God promised to Jews and Gentiles, the one who came to renew all that is broken in this world. Paul’s message was that, through Jesus, everyone can be restored to God and brought into God’s new world.
- Right away then we see that Christianity is *not* a western white man’s religion. That’s fake news. Jesus was eastern, not western. Jesus’ skin was brown, not white. But most of all, he did not come to create a religion but to bring salvation to all people regardless of ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic class.
 - You can see this inclusivity even in Paul’s strategy. Notice that they didn’t come into Philippi seeking to reach a specific target audience and then developed a custom-tailored plan to only speak to that group.
 - They spoke the good news about Jesus to upper-class educated women like Lydia, lower-class uneducated people like the slave girl, and middle-class

practical people like the jailer and his household. And the stress here is on women. Some people accuse Paul of being sexist. This is also fake news. When Paul walked up to this prayer meeting and saw it was only women he didn't turn around and leave to find some men. No, he sat down with these women and talked with them.

- How will our city experience the renewing power of the gospel? It really isn't complicated. We go about our lives in this great city of Victoria and we seek to tell all types of people about Jesus.
 - Are you praying for opportunities to talk? Are you taking advantage of those opportunities as they come up?

WATCH GOD WORK

- Go to the city. Talk to people about Jesus. And finally, **(SHOW SLIDE 7) watch God work.**
 - Look at verse 14-15. **READ 14-15 - *One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay."* And she prevailed upon us.**
- Why did Lydia become a Christian? Is it because she was smart enough to make a good decision? No. Is it because she was bent that way? No. Is it because Paul was such a good speaker and perfectly answered every question? No.
 - It is because the Lord opened her heart. No one calls on Jesus for salvation until God opens their heart to pay attention to the gospel.
- When God does this a person is changed forever. You can see some marks of a true Christian right here.
 - Notice that she is immediately concerned that those who live in her house also hear about Jesus. She takes Paul and his companions there so they too can hear this good news.
 - Next, they are all baptized, declaring their faith in Jesus.
 - Last, she now wants to use her wealth, particularly her house as a ministry centre to host Paul and his companions. At the end of the chapter she is hosting the whole church, using her wealth for ministry purposes.
- Lydia's conversion story is such an encouragement. You see, many Christians do not talk to others about Jesus because they think they will fail. They think they are not good enough with words and won't be able to answer people questions and so no one will receive Christ.
 - But listen: it is not your job to open people's hearts to receive Jesus. You are utterly unqualified for the job so don't take that stress on yourself. Your job and my job are much simpler: talk to people about Jesus and then sit back and watch God act. In his time and in his way, God opens hearts to believe in Christ.

JESUS CAME FOR ALL TYPES OF PEOPLE

- Do you see what this chapter is telling us? This chapter is telling us that Jesus came for all types of people, not just certain types.
 - Jesus is not just a crutch for people whose lives are falling apart. That's fake news. Here is Lydia—a well put together, successful, wealthy, upper class business woman—who found in Jesus all that she was looking for.

- Jesus is not just for people that are “bent that way” or are “the religious type.” That’s fake news. Lydia may have been interested in having spiritual conversations with Paul but, as we will see in a few weeks, the jailer certainly wasn’t and treated Paul and his friends in brutal ways.
 - This chapter is showing us how Jesus came for all the types of people we find in a city: for messed up types and for successful types, for poor types and rich types. It doesn’t matter your age, gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic class. Jesus came for all types of people.
- And don’t we see all of this wonderfully played out right here our own urban church?
 - Think of just some of our baptisms over the past year. Think of Brian Pellerin. He is a young Canadian man who said that Jesus rescued him from tremendous darkness.
 - He was baptized alongside Christine Lee who could not be more different from Brian. Christine is an Infectious Disease Doctor from Korea but who also declared how much Jesus has transformed her life.
 - Christine is so different from Nick Grandy. Before Jesus saved him, he said he was an atheist who thought that anyone who believed in God was a fool who needed a fairy tale to quell their fears.
 - Nick is so different from Daiton Lingaard, who is a Canadian guy serving our country in the Navy as a Naval Warfare Officer.
 - Then think of the four Rendle family baptisms. They all grew up in a Christian home and as missionaries in Columbia. They are so different from Selina who said she did not grow up in a Christian home.
 - We have university professors, bus drivers, dentists, photographers, doctors, teachers, and—just like in Philippi—many who are retired. We have people with Indigenous backgrounds, people from Rwanda, the Philippines, India, Korea, the Netherlands, Mexico, Indonesia, Russia, Ukraine, and most amazingly, we even have people from Saskatchewan.
 - Jesus came for all types of people.
- Not only did Jesus come for all types of people. He also meets each of us in our own particular way.
 - We will see in the weeks to come that the slave girl needed a power encounter. The jailer needed practical help with his guilty past. How about Lydia?
- Lydia is a rich woman who has an eye for beauty. As Paul talks she finds in Jesus riches that she had never known. As Paul share about Jesus she finds a beauty that captures her heart. Have you seen the riches and beauty of Jesus?
 - You see, Jesus set aside the riches that were rightfully his as the eternal Son of God. He who was rich became poor and took on a human nature. He did not live in a palace but was born in a stable and had no place to lay his head.
 - Jesus set aside his beauty; a beauty which evoked the worship of billions of angels. He put this aside and became a man. Isaiah writes that **“he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him”** (Is 53:2).
 - The rich and beautiful one became impoverished and ugly. After he was arrested Mark 15:17 says that the soldiers **“clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him.”** They mockingly saluted him saying, **“Hail, King of the Jews!”** They spit in his face. They punched him in the

- face. They tore out his beard. They ripped apart his skin with 39 lashes of a whip that was laced with sharp pieces of metal.
- We have a phrase to describe this: they beat him into a bloody pulp. That is no exaggeration. He became utterly disfigured. He was too ugly to look upon.
 - Again, Isaiah puts it like this: ***“there were many who were appalled at him— his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness.”***
 - And then he took all the ugliness of our sin upon him at the cross, so that even God turned his face away. The rich one became poor. The beautiful one became ugly.
 - Why would he do this? He did it for you and for me. Jesus, the beautiful one, became ugly so that anyone who comes to him might have their sins forgiven, be clothed in his perfect beauty, and be welcomed into the presence of God.
 - He who was rich became poor so that we though his poverty might become rich. And we are rich beyond imagination. He does not simply grant us forgiveness. He also adopts us into his family. He gives us the full status of God’s sons and daughters. If that were not enough, he then gives us even more. He makes us his own heirs who will one day inherit immortal bodies, a new earth, and God himself.
 - The biggest fortune in the world is nothing more than a copper penny next to dwelling with God on a new earth in immortal bodies. What good news! What riches! Jesus, the rich one became poor so that you could inherit eternal riches. Jesus, the beautiful one became ugly so that ugliness of your sin could be forgiven and you could be made beautiful in God’s sight.

CONCLUSION

- Lydia found wealth in Jesus that far surpassed all her wealth. Lydia found beauty in Jesus that far surpassed all the beauty of this world. Have you found this in Jesus? It doesn’t matter who you are or what your background. Jesus saves all types of people. Give your life to him today. Bow before him and say, ***“Jesus, forgive me of my sins and rescue me.”***
 - This is what we are about as a church: renewing our community through the gospel. This passage shows three ways to do this: go to the city, talk to people about Jesus, and watch God work.