

Guest Preacher - Mr Andrew Maciver (Elder North Tolsta)

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Preacher: Mr. Andrew Maciver

[0 : 00] So if you turn back with me to the chapter we read, Acts chapter 16. I'm not going to take a text as such. I'm going to look at the whole section that we read when Paul and his colleagues came to the city of Philippi.

So we saw from the reading that Paul came to Philippi around the year AD 50. And the reason he came, of course, was prompted by the call to go to Macedonia, which we read in verses 9 to 10. I'll read that. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night, and a man of Macedonia was standing there urging him and saying, Come over to Macedonia and help us.

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. So we see that Paul had been going through, this was what we call Paul's second missionary journey.

He had been going through Asia, which is modern-day Turkey. And the Holy Spirit was directing him and not allowing him to go to certain places. But he had this very distinct call to go to Macedonia.

[1 : 23] Now, of course, Macedonia is what is now the northern part of Greece. So Paul and his colleagues, Paul had left his sending church in Antioch, himself in Silas.

And on the way, they picked up Timothy. And then when they get to the port city of Troas, they meet Paul. So the four of them travelled across the Aegean Sea, and they came to the town of Neapolis, which is the modern-day city of Kavala in northern Greece.

So immediately, Paul heads for Philippi. That was the first place he landed in. Now, in Philippi, they preached the gospel.

People were converted, and a church was established. So what we're going to look at tonight, I've called this sermon, Christian Conversion, Turning, and Transformation.

And the Christian author, Paul Helm, says, conversion can be defined as the awakening of a person who is dead in sin to an awareness of the need to place faith in Jesus Christ and to turn from sin and self to God and repentance.

[2 : 47] So what we're going to do, I'm going to look at this in two sections. The first part, we will look at, I've called conversions in Philippi. And then the second part, I'm going to try and look at understanding Christian conversion.

So let's first of all look at, Paul has three encounters, three prominent encounters that we read of in this passage, three people that he meets.

Now, let me give you just a little bit of background, first of all. In verse 12, we see Paul comes to Philippi, and it says, it's a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.

So Roman colony is quite significant, because Roman colonies had been set up in different cities throughout the Roman Empire, and they were very distinct, because they were run on the same principles as Rome itself.

So the chapter we read focuses on three specific people that Paul met and his colleagues met in Philippi.

[4 : 00] Now, about two years ago, my wife and I, we did a trip where we travelled through Greece.

We'd spent two weeks, and we went from, we followed the Apostle Paul's journey through Greece. We started off in Cavala, which is Neapolis. Then we went to Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and then we finished off in Corinth.

Now, you can still see the ruins of ancient Philippi. There's a lot of different things. You can see the Roman Forum. You can see the famous Roman road, the Via Ignatia running through the city.

The ancient theatre is virtually intact within the city. And you can also see a number of ruined church basilica, basilicas that were built during the early Christian era.

in the city. So there was obviously, after Paul had been there, we read here about some early converts, but the church in Philippi did become quite established over the next period.

[5 : 08] So the three individuals that Luke tends to focus on very much, he gives us more information here, probably because Luke was actually here. If you look through the Book of Acts, sometimes there is detailed description of some of the converts, like the Ethiopian unit, for example.

But we get so much information about Lydia, the slave girl, and about the jailer, because Luke was actually there with them.

So we meet the three individuals. Lydia was a businesswoman. The slave girl was an exploited clairvoyant. And the jailer was a working class man.

He was probably an ex-soldier, an ex-Roman soldier. Now, the late Tim Keller, he wrote a paper about the conversions in Philippi.

And he sort of categorised them. He tries to draw out the big differences between the three individuals. For example, ethnically, they were different.

[6 : 15] Lydia was Asian. She came from Thyatira, an Asia Minor. The jailer was Roman. And the slave girl was probably a native Greek.

And also, economically, they were very different. Lydia was a wealthy businesswoman. The jailer was what Tim Keller calls blue-collar working class.

And the slave girl was poor. So there's very different differences between the three of them, the three individuals that we read about.

Now, when Paul and his colleagues arrived in Philippi, the first challenge for the... How are we going to reach out in this city? Because when Paul went to the other cities, there was usually a synagogue.

So he would always go to the synagogue and start preaching in the synagogue. But there was no synagogue in Philippi. So he finds out that there's a group of women who are actually meeting by the riverside outside the city.

[7 : 21] So let's look at the first... I'm going to look at the three encounters that Paul and his colleagues had within Philippi. So the first one is Lydia.

Verses 11 to 15, we meet Lydia. Now, as I said, Lydia was from Thyatira in Turkey. So she had migrated to Philippi.

Thyatira was the centre of the purple dye trade. So she was a seller of purple goods. Now, only rich people or royalty wore these purple goods because they were so expensive.

Now, Lydia, we see as a worshipper of God. And she met with the other women at this place of prayer by the riverside.

Now, when we were in Philippi, you have to walk about 20 minutes out of the city. You have to go outside the city boundary. And you come to a little...

[8 : 20] This is more than Lydia. There's a village called Lydia now at the very site that this meeting took place.

There's a well, which is called Lydia's Well. And there's a beautiful building called Lydia's Baptistry. And a lot of Greek people bring their children there for baptism. Lydia is a saint.

She's treated as a saint in the Greek Orthodox Church. So Paul and his colleagues go to this riverside outside the city.

Probably they were meeting outside the city because they were not allowed to meet within the city boundary of Philippi. So Paul goes to this riverside and he meets these women who were meeting there for prayer.

They were probably devoted to Judaism. Lydia was not a Jew. She was a Gentile. But she was obviously very interested in the Jewish God.

[9 : 26] So what did Paul actually say to them? Well, we don't know. The text doesn't tell us what Paul said to them. But if we look at the Book of Acts, there's quite a number of different sermons that are included in the Book of Acts.

And when Paul goes to the next city, which is Thessalonica, he actually did preach in the synagogue there. And we can read there what he said in Acts 17, verses 2 to 3.

He says he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying, this Jesus whom I proclaim to you is

the Christ.

So maybe he shared a very similar message in Philippi as well to these women at the riverside.

Now, we know then that the Lord opened Lydia's heart.

Lydia believed and she was converted. Now, when the text says that she was a worshiper of God, it's actually, the Greek words seems a bit stronger than that.

[10:35] It says that she actually revered God. She was in awe of God. So she really had a lot of respect for this Jewish God that she came to know about.

But Lydia believed and she believed in the Lord Jesus and she was baptized, of course, as well as her household, which could have been her family, could have been her servants as well.

And then she invited Paul to come and stay at her house. So that was the first encounter. We see that Lydia became a Christian through Paul's preaching.

And then the next two encounters were very unlikely people, a jailer and a slave girl. So let's look at the second encounter, which is the slave girl.

So we read about that from verse 16 down to verse 19. So looking at verse 16, As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.

[11:52] Now this girl was possessed by an evil spirit. She was a clairvoyant. And the actual text says that she had the spirit of a python, a snake, a python.

I won't go into the details, but it's all to do with some Greek mythology. People loved to get predictions about the future.

The Romans and the Greeks, they were really into having their fortunes told. So this girl who could tell fortunes, her owners made a lot of profit out of her.

She was completely exploited by her owners. They didn't care anything about her as long as she was making money for them. She was in double bondage.

She was demon-possessed. And she was also being treated like property. She was very likely at the opposite end of the social spectrum to Lydia.

[12:50] Lydia was a very wealthy woman. This girl would have been at the bottom end of society. Now, as Paul, obviously, after he had gone to the riverside the first time round, he kept on going back to the riverside.

And he kept meeting this girl. He kept meeting her again. We read in verse 17, She followed Paul and us, crying out, These men are servants of the Most High God.

And the message she was actually saying was true. It was completely true what she was saying.

But Paul got a bit upset. He got angry with her because she kept coming day after day to keep on going on about this message every day.

And Paul became annoyed. Now, why did he become annoyed? Well, the message was correct.

But I think what Paul was saying, because the message was coming from this slave girl who was demon-possessed, he felt it was probably hindering his ministry.

He didn't want to be sort of associated with this demon-possessed person. So he immediately casts the demon out of the girl, and she was cured.

[14:11] And so the question is, was this girl converted? Now, the text, nowhere does the text tell us that she was converted.

But reading through different commentators, most commentators I've looked at, they all believe that she was converted. For example, John Stott, Tim Keller himself believes, F.F. Bruce, they all believe this girl was converted.

But the most convincing argument I've seen is from an American pastor, Al Mohler. He's written a two-volume short commentary on Acts.

And this is what he says. He says he believes that she was converted. Firstly, exorcisms in the New Testament point to the power of God, not the individual, in this case, Paul.

Power and authority over spiritual forces of evil rest in Jesus Christ alone. Secondly, when demons were cast out in the New Testament, the person received spiritual healing as well as physical healing.

[15:21] He makes a point that Jesus made in Luke chapter 11 that exorcism remains useless unless the indwelling of God replaces the evil spirit.

And Al Mohler concludes that this girl not only received deliverance from the evil spirit, but she also came to a saving knowledge and faith in Jesus Christ.

So this was great news for the girl, but not such good news for her owners because they lost all the business that she was, the money and everything she was making for them.

They were furious, so they dragged Paul and Silas before the rulers and the magistrates in Philippi. So Paul and Silas are then beaten and they're sent to jail.

And of course, this is then a trigger for the next ministry encounter that Paul was to experience in Philippi. And that was with the Philippian jailer.

[16:33] So God had ordained a meeting with this jailer who was very likely a retired Roman soldier. The old soldiers in the Roman Empire Army, they would usually retire to colonial cities like Philippi.

And in this case, it looks as if the jailer was an ex-soldier and now he was working in the Philippian prison service.

So his job was to keep the prisoners totally secure. He was a working class man, likely toughened by years of military service.

He looks like he was a family man. We know that he had a family and he was probably non-religious. He didn't really have much interest in any religion before he met Paul and Silas.

So Paul and Silas find themselves locked up in chains in the inner prison and they're put into stocks. Now, you can still see the little prison where they think Paul and Silas were imprisoned.

[17:42] I always imagined that the prison was going to be a big prison like you see on TV, but it's actually a little cave. It looks like a little cave and it was probably at the very back of the prison and you can still see the ruins of it in the city of Philippi.

Now, Paul and Silas, as we know, were praying and singing in the jail and the jailer's world was just about to be turned completely around.

A divine earthquake came. His world is shaken in more ways than one. He just didn't know what to do.

The prison was shaken, the doors were flung open and the jailer thought that everybody had escaped and he knew that that was it for him.

He would have been executed for allowing the prisoners to go. So he was preparing to commit suicide. But Paul intervenes and stops him and then the jailer came trembling.

[18:51] In verse 29, he came trembling with fear. He fell down before Paul and Silas and he said to famous, what must I do to be saved? And of course, the reply was, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

So the jailer believed there and then and also we know that some of the members of his household believed as well. So we see there three very different cases of different people who came to know the Lord in Philippi.

Again, Tim Keller goes on to, he's comparing them spiritually. If we look at them spiritually, Lydia, well, she was a God fearer.

She already knew about God and she respected God. The jailer was very indifferent. He was probably non-religious.

He had no interest in anything to do with God. And of course, the slave girl was tormented by an evil spirit. But then if we look at how they came to know the Lord, then Lydia came to know the Lord by public exposition, by preaching, basically.

[20:09] The jailer came through a powerful miracle and the example of the apostles, of Paul and Silas, and the slave girl through a dramatic exorcism.

So three very different people came to know the Lord in three very different ways. Lydia was already a worshipper of God and now comes to know the Saviour.

The slave girl had no control over her mind or body, but she set free from her demon and from her owners, and we believe that she received a new spirit.

The jailer, he had no thoughts of Jesus and he found salvation when he wasn't even looking for it. There is no indication that he had any interest in God before he met Paul and Silas in this moment of crisis.

But because Paul had been directed by the Holy Spirit to come to Philippi, these three individuals plus others were converted and they came to know the Lord.

[21:23] They underwent a conversion experience. So that's what I wanted to look at in the second part, is how do we understand Christian conversion?

We hear a lot of terms from the Bible and other terms that people use. Born again, saved, redemption, new creation.

We hear people saying accepting Jesus as my Saviour or asking Christ into one's heart. A lot of these terms are a bit confusing.

So that what we want to look at now is what does conversion actually involve? And what is our role in conversion and what is God's role in conversion?

I'm going back to Paul Helm again. Paul Helm was, he actually passed away in December. He was a professor of philosophy in University College London, but he was also a Reformed theologian who wrote quite a number of books, wrote a lot of Banner of Truth books, for example.

[22 : 38] And the definition I gave earlier, which Paul Helm gave in his book, conversion can be defined as the awakening of a person who's dead in sin to an awareness of the need to place faith in Jesus Christ and to turn from sin and self to God and repentance.

So we see from that definition, first of all, we're dead in sin. There's nothing we can do to save ourselves unless we are awakened.

So he said, the awakening of a person. And then we have to believe, we have to believe the gospel, the gospel about Jesus. And then we come to repentance and faith.

So scripture teaches that conversion is a divine work of God followed by human response through repentance and faith. Now, we saw from the examples we saw in Philippi that conversion can be in different ways.

It can be instantaneous. It can be over a period of time. It can result from personal crisis. Other times, it can be, people can come very gently to know the Lord.

[23 : 56] But we know that there's a number of different factors that come into play. For example, our upbringing can be influential. The communities we're brought up in.

And we know from our own background in Lewis that we have had so much immersion in the gospel growing up that we probably, they shall probably higher proportion of Christians in Lewis and maybe in other parts of the country.

Life experience as well come into play. And then knowledge and intellect. A lot of us grew up in Sunday school. We learned Bible stories.

We learned catechism maybe. And we have a better understanding possibly of things in the gospel. But we know that from scripture and from experience there are different ways of coming with the way people come to know the Lord.

So what I want to look at now is just a little bit about understanding how Christian conversions come about.

[25 : 11] I don't have time tonight to go into if you go through the book of Acts for example there's a lot of different examples of people who come to know the Lord in Acts. For example this Peter sermon at Pentecost when 3,000 people were converted at one time and then we had the conversions like the Ethiopian eunuch or the Roman centurion and even Paul himself had a dramatic conversion and then when we think of people from church history as well so many people had different types of conversion as well.

Now I sat down last year and I started looking at conversion quite a bit I found four books that were very helpful I've mentioned Paul Helm Paul Helm wrote a series of books for Banner of Truth and the one I've been referring to is called The Beginnings Word and Spirit and Conversion it's called and he focused on three elements to do with conversion conviction of sin faith and repentance another book that's useful and recommended is John Murray John Murray who was a professor at Westminster in Philadelphia Redemption Accomplished and Applied very useful book to go through where he goes through all the different stages of conversion as well there's another book an American pastor called Michael Lawrence who's written a very small book just titled Conversion where he looks at how people are converted and probably the one that helped me most in understanding it is a

Canadian author called Gordon Smith Gordon T. Smith he wrote a book called Beginning Well Christian Conversion An Authentic Transformation Gordon Smith he looked at scripture he looked at Christian autobiographies and he tried to understand conversion and then he wrote in his book he came up with seven different elements that he thought were involved in a good conversion so what I did was I just tried to bring it all together and trying to understand for ourselves what exactly does conversion involve and I've come up with just four headings four aspects of conversion that tend to summarise what Christian conversion is about number one regeneration number two belief

in Jesus

Christ number three repentance and faith and number four transformation so we'll look at these as we finish this off so first of all regeneration we know that it's God who takes the initiative in salvation regeneration refers to God's miraculous work by the power of the Holy Spirit that enables people to come alive spiritually those of you who are brought up in Sunday school and learned the catechism of course are probably familiar with question 31 what is effectual calling effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit whereby By convincing us of our sin and misery enlightening our minds and the knowledge of Christ and renewing our wills he does persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel so it is by grace that we are regenerated

God makes the first move we can never do this because of our fallenness and it's the Lord that opens our hearts we saw this in the case of Lydia it was the Lord who opened her heart so regeneration is necessary because we are dead in sin and it is essential before anybody is converted regenerated sinners are enabled by the Holy Spirit to believe we repent of our sins and then we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ so that's the first aspect regeneration the second one is belief we have to believe we have to believe in Jesus Christ this is the intellectual component our understanding becomes eliminated we start to understand the gospel we understand scripture for the first time there's a change and normally scripture is involved in helping us believe we believe the gospel usually if we read it if it's been preached to us or maybe it's been shared with us or we've been taught the gospel and we must believe the gospel message itself and the gospel message is quite straightforward we believe that Jesus is Christ the son of God we believe that he died for our sins and through him we have forgiveness and we have hope so that's belief so we have to believe in Jesus

[30 : 40] Christ as well that's part of the conversion process now the third area is repentance and faith now usually repentance and faith are dealt with together they're closely very closely aligned and repentance means turning it's a turning it's a change of mind it's a change of direction in a person's outlook one day we're going in this direction and then we completely turn around and our thinking is different we start to acknowledge sin we start to understand sin in our lives maybe through preaching we experience conviction of sin we realise we are guilty but repentance is not remorse we can feel sorry for something but we don't repent it's not remorse there's a rejection when we come to repent there's a rejection of sin there's a rejection of the pattern of life that we led in the past we acknowledge our guilt and we ask for

God's forgiveness and mercy but we know that sin still continues in our lives we still struggle with sin and we will always have the battle with sin in our lives until the day we leave this earth and then of course very closely linked to repentance is faith faith is also a gift from God we come to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ Paul Helm again says saving faith is a person's reliance upon God's mercy as revealed in Christ Jesus and as displayed by him on the cross so personal trust is an essential part of saving faith we're justified by faith our sins are pardoned we're accepted as righteous because of Christ's righteousness and all received by faith alone so the result of faith is we get assurance of forgiveness and we get joy knowing that we are now found in Christ and then the fourth element the fourth aspect which I mentioned is transformation when we are converted there's an always a big transformation in our lives there's a transfer of allegiance we change our loyalty there's a new commitment we have a new master we come under new authority and we become obedient to God and to Christ the quality of our lives change our moral standards change we are now living in light not in darkness we no longer live for ourselves we now live for Christ and we love him because he first loved us so these are the four aspects that I feel covers what a true Christian conversion is but there are other elements as well very briefly baptism is another thing that happens it's a sacramental component now I know we have different Christian traditions some churches have believers baptism we have usually in Presbyterian church we have infant baptism but if somebody hasn't been baptized at all then of course they should be baptized when they come to believe the second thing is incorporation into a

Christian community when we come to faith we normally join with the people of God we become part of the church we're not designed to live in isolation from one another and then another aspect that develops is discipleship we grow as we participate in church community in church life whether it's corporate or private Bible study or prayer that's going to help us grow as well our behaviour hopefully becomes more Christ like we have an empowerment for life and obedience to service to mission to evangelism it's interesting that you know Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian church 12

years after he was there and that church by 12 years later was a thriving church it had become a thriving Christian community it's estimated that there was maybe probably 100 to 150 members in that church then so that's showing you that these

Christians these early Christians that came to believe in Jesus they were obviously participating in church life and the church grew quite significantly so just to conclude just some final thoughts really of what we've been looking at tonight we've been looking at conversion the Bible is clear that conversion is a sovereign act of God and supernaturally giving us new birth we know that we need to be regenerated we come to believe the gospel by faith and we repent of our sin so we know that saving faith is always accompanied by repentance now we saw as well that conversions can come in many many different ways some people come to faith very gently maybe at a young age some are more open to God than others some people can be quite hostile or indifferent to God before they come to know him our upbringing is important upbringing in faith communities like here the church here in

[37 : 05] Barvis very important the prayers of our parents and grandparents can be important as well I think can have an influence other people come in crisis moments we saw from the experience of the jailer and we know of people ourselves who have come to faith through moments of crisis in their lives as well so whatever happens we see some dramatic turnarounds in people's lives when they come to know the Lord we saw imagine the turnaround in the slave girl's life when she was cleansed of the demon and hopefully came to know the Lord so conversion leads to transformation as I mentioned we become part of a Christian community the Bible becomes very important to us and we aim to grow in our faith as well we start to read

God's word we come to join with people in prayer we go and listen to preaching we start reading Christian books which can all help us develop and grow as Christians and we also become committed to mission and evangelism we want to see others come to faith so I think all of us tonight our real hope is that everyone will believe the gospel I hope that everyone here will come to know the gospel we know that some of us I know many of you will have already believed but my prayer is that everybody would believe the jailer's conversion is one of the most dramatic we've seen in the New Testament and the question I want to leave with you is the same question that he asked Paul and Silas what must I do to be saved believe in the Lord

Jesus Christ and you will be saved this is the call of the gospel you have to believe so may God bless that word to us and I hope that you've followed through as we look there at the topic of conversion so let's join in and play as we close Lord we do thank you that you are a God who we can come to a God who is loving and caring and who wants each one of us to come to put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ we thank you that Jesus came into this world we thank you that he offered himself on the cross and that he he is now risen and he intercedes for us we thank you that we can come to him that we can know salvation we can know redemption through his work alone we thank you for for our church communities here we thank you that we can come together we can come we can come to encourage one another so be with us as we as we devote ourselves to the gospel and to reaching out in our communities with the gospel we thank you that that that you bring enlightenment you bring us from darkness into light when we come to know the truth of the gospel so be with each one of us be with everyone present here i pray for everyone and their families too we pray for those members of our families who maybe don't have so much interest and care in knowing the gospel at this time but we pray that they would come to to know to know christ jesus as lord so be with us tonight we we want to give you the praise and the glory in everything we do we want to worship you and and and to follow you wholeheartedly as well so be with us now and we ask all this for jesus sake amen so we're going to finish off singing psalm 19 in the psalter page 223 so psalm 19 page 223 in the scottish psalter and we're going to sing from verse 7 down to verse 11 so verse 7 god's law is perfect and converts the soul in sin that lies god's testimony is most sure and makes the simple wise so in conclusion we'll sing these verses from verse 7 down to verse 11 god's law is perfect and converts the soul in sin that lies god's testimony the soul is not holy not sure and makes a sin the wise the statutes of the lord are right

And to rejoice the heart The Lord's love and his pure and dark Light in the eyes impart Unfounded is the fear of God And of danger forever The judgments of the Lord are true And righteous all together

The more than gold Yea, much fine gold To be desired are That hurry, hurry from the comb That drop a sweeter fire Moreover, they plight, servant Lord How he is thy shirt frame A great reward

provided is

[45 : 08] For them that keep the same Amen I'll leave you with these words.

This is from the Gospel of John Chapter 20, verse 31 Which is John's main priority In writing his Gospel But these are written So that you may believe That Jesus is the Christ The Son of God And that by believing You may have life in his name So may God bless you And thank you for listening Thank you